Learning outcomes

After this session, you will be able to:

• explain what Tall Man lettering is
• identify situations where Tall Man lettering can be used to reduce risk of wrong medicine error
• describe the evidence level for Tall Man lettering as an error-reduction technique.
Background

Medicine name errors, particularly with regard to medicines with ‘look-alike, sound-alike’ names, are common and harm can occur.

Patient received tamoxifen 20mg rather than the prescribed tenoxicam 20mg. Patient took the tamoxifen for three weeks and suffered from hair loss, constipation and sweating.

Patient was dispensed Atropt (atropine) instead of Azopt (brinzolamide) and developed blurred vision, dilated pupils and raised intra-ocular pressure in each eye for three weeks measured at 26mmHg. Luckily no permanent harm occurred.
What is Tall Man lettering?

• It is an error-prevention strategy used as part of a multi-faceted approach to reduce the risk of look-alike and sound-alike medicine name confusion and errors.

• It is a typographic technique that uses selective capitalisation to help make similar-looking medicine names easier to differentiate.

• Its purpose is to help select or supply the right medicine.
How does it work?

Tall Man lettering combines lower- and upper-case letters to highlight the differences between look-alike and sound-alike medicine names, like fluOXETine and fluVOXAMine, making them easier for the eye to distinguish.
Evidence

• Evaluation shows considerable variation in the effectiveness of Tall Man lettering\textsuperscript{1-15}.

• Small amount of literature available shows that, at a minimum, Tall Man lettering should alert clinicians’ to medicines that are at risk of name confusion and possible medication error without increasing the risk of errors.\textsuperscript{1, 9-14}

• Inconclusive data on whether technique is effective in preventing medicine selection errors.\textsuperscript{15}

• Mid Tall Man lettering format advocated as being the most effective and easily applied variant.\textsuperscript{2, 11}
Why are we doing this?

• The Commission has received numerous enquiries about Tall Man lettering standards, endorsement and application techniques from clinicians and software vendors.

• A New Zealand list would prevent proliferations of local Tall Man lists and inconsistent technique application.
What could Tall Man lettering be used on?

- electronic drop-down medicine lists
- automated dispensing cabinet screens
- SMART pumps
- computer-generated pharmacy labels
- medicine shelf labels
- pre-printed order sheets
Final messages

• Train staff on what Tall Man lettering is and how it works before it is introduced.
• Familiarise staff to existing look-alike/sound-alike name pairs to improve risk awareness.
• Don’t overuse Tall Man lettering as this is likely to reduce the error-reduction effect.
• Don’t use different styles of Tall Man lettering as this will cause confusion.
References


